

## Exceptionally Stranger Things by Reddwalker314

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**Summary:** A year has passed since El closed The Gate to the Upside Down. The Party starts to head into their first year of High School, enjoying life and being a teenager. But things start to change once a new kid moves in. As he tries to find his place in The Party, he sees the town for what is truly is. They all begin to realize things have gotten much stranger than they ever were before.

# 1. Chapter 1

I honestly can't get over Stranger Things! I've been geekin' out over it since Season 2 dropped. My love for the show only grew and grew until I started writing about it and finally decided to start writing a story for it! This is a story with my OC in it so if you don't like fanfics with OC's in it then ya might as well click away now :P. I'd have more to say about this but my mind is all over the place right now, sadly. This is officially my first fanfic about this show so I hope you guys enjoy it!

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Mike closed his locker after grabbing all the necessary items for his classes. Lucas, Will and Dustin were talking amongst themselves about Star Wars and comic books, dissecting each topic as they went along. Mike on the other hand was in his own little world, thinking about El again. He hadn't stopped since she came back and ultimately closed the gate to the upside down. Especially after the SnowBall, and the moment they had together. That one intimate moment, where it was just the two of them in the world. The moment he had waited for since she disappeared into the Upside Down. To hold her in his arms and never let go. To feel her body heat warming him, and to see her beautiful eyes staring back at him. Ever since that night he's been missing El while he's at school. Even if they were together the night before. Seeing her again was just a daily thing he missed.

"Mike!" Will called, his voice suddenly chiming into Mike's head.

"H-huh?"

"Who do you think would win in a fight? Spider-Man or Captain America?"

Mike waved his hand and rolled his eyes. "Pffft definitely Captain America!"

"Are you kidding?!" Lucas cried outraged. "Spider-Man has Spidey Senses! He can see Caps attacks a mile away!"

"So? Cap's a super soldier! He knows like every martial art known to

man! Spidey couldn't handle all of that!"

"Well Spidey does have the proportionate strength, speed, agility, stamina, and durability of a spider." Dustin added.

"That's suddenly better than a super soldier?" Mike questioned giving Dustin a skeptical look.

Dustin shrugged. "Pretty much. He caught a car that was thrown at him by the Hulk."

Mike groaned, face palming himself. He glanced to the side and saw Max suddenly heading their way. Hoping she'd at least take his side or change the subject.

"Max." Lucas called. "Please tell Mike here that Spider-Man would whoop Captain America's ass any day."

"And please tell Lucas how ridiculous he sounds." Mike shot.

Max laughed. "Why is this even a discussion? Spidey would win hands down."

Mike groaned loudly again while Lucas exclaimed in victory.

"What'd I tell ya?"

"That's bull! Cap is so much better than Spider-Man."

"Ok anyway." Max interrupted. "Are we still hanging out after school?"

The boys all confirmed that that plan was still in affect. They were all excited to hang out after school. Mostly because they had two more people in their group who had close to the same interests they did.

"Also." Dustin added. "I'd like to add on to that question and ask if everyone's still on for the sleepover?"

"I am." Will announced.

"I know I am." Lucas said.

"Me too." Mike said.

"Same." Max added.

"Great! We just need El to let us know if she's coming and we'll have a full party." Dustin said. Subtly glancing at Mike after mentioning El's name.

Mike picked up the timing on Dustin's glance almost instantly. "Why'd you look at me when you said that?"

Dustin shrugged innocently. "No reason."

Mike's eyes narrowed trying to see through Dustin's bluff.

"What're you trying to say?"

"Nothing. Just, Y'know, pointing out the fact that you and El are basically dating, so you should be able to ask her and find out if she can come to the sleepover."

Mike rolled his eyes. "For the thousandth time. We. Aren't. Dating!"

"C'mon Mike." Will said.

"Really?" Lucas questioned.

Mike's eyes flickered back and forth between the two of them.  
"What?"

"You act like it's not painfully obvious." Will pointed out. "You guys are completely in love with each other."

"No we aren't!" Mike defended.

"C'mon Mike." Dustin prodded. "Don't act like we didn't see you two kissing at the dance."

"But you didn't." Mike stated.

Dustin sighed. "You're right, we didn't." A smile slowly made its way into his face. "But Nancy and Jonathan did."

Mike's gaze shifted back to the hallway while Dustin added on to the teasing. A kid that was strolling past them caught his eyes while he tried to shut out his friend's teasing. A light skinned, black curly haired boy. He's seen that kid on numerous occasions throughout the first week of school. Always by himself, never talking to anyone.

The boy met eyes with Mike for a split second. That second felt like an eternity. Mike could almost sense what the boy was going through. He could see it in his eyes. He could sense his loneliness, sense how he wasn't happy while he was in school. Almost like how Mike was before he met Will.

But the boy looked away from him. Like he knew what Mike was thinking when he saw him. Walking past them faster than he initially was.

Mike watched him walk away from them, suddenly able to hear his friends teasing once more.

"Hey guys, who is that kid?"

"Uh-uh. Don't try to change the subject, Mike." Dustin said.

"No really. Who is he?" Mike replied pointing and directing everyone's attention to the boy walking away from them.

"Oh. Him."

Mike turned to Dustin, his face twisting in confusion. "You know about him?"

"Only a little. He's new here."

"Yeah. I heard he's mixed too." Lucas added.

"Mixed?" Mike repeated. "Like..." He met eyes with Lucas to make sure he wasn't jumping the gun and assuming something he shouldn't. But Lucas nodded to him. Confirming to Mike that this boy was black and white. It wasn't too out of the norm for mixed or interracial couples to exist in the 80's. But then again, it wasn't seen very often. Most of the time being rare and even frowned upon by people who couldn't understand how love works.

"Wow." Mike said. Astonished by how unique the boy was. "I've seen him a bunch of times throughout the first week of school. He's always alone. I don't know if he has friends."

"From what I hear, he doesn't talk a lot." Lucas said. "He's pretty antisocial."

Antisocial or not. Mike was thinking all this boy needed was some friends. Friends that understood what it was like to be unique. Friends like them. But before he could even think about proposing that idea to the group, the bell rang grabbing everyone's attention.

"Shit. Bell rung. Better start heading to class! They say 5 minutes is enough but I honestly doubt it." Dustin said. "See you guys later!"

Everyone shortly said their goodbyes and heading to their individual classes. Mike slowed down still contemplating about the boy. That idea still lingered in his head. He wasn't afraid of adding him into the party. But now wasn't the time to think about it, he had to hurry to his class before risking being late.

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The boy started jogging to his class after the bell rang. Thinking to himself as he did. "That guy keeps staring at me. Every time I see him. Maybe I should talk to him. It's hard to make friends here, plus he probably wants to talk anyway. For whatever reason..." He sighed. "Who am I kidding? Who would ever wanna be friends with James Willard? One of the most quietest kids in the school?" James hated being so quiet at school. But he couldn't help it. It was hard for him to make friends, not to mention he was fairly new to everything in the area since he just moved there. He figured the best he could do now was just lay low and hope the school year would fly by. The town seemed like a place to live an average life in. Maybe he could manage it...

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"Go long!" Lucas shouted to Dustin. He waited a few moments for Dustin to gain a few more yards from him, before thinking he was far enough and launching the football to him. It wasn't a pro quarterback throw, but it was enough to get it to Dustin's position. Dustin shouted in victory once he managed to catch the ball. Stomping around and

yelling "Touchdown!"

The school day had ended as fast as it began. Allowing the Party to enjoy themselves with a get together before they got back to school the next day. Max was teaching Will how to skateboard. Shakily making some progress as she did, with some slips and stumbles along the way. Mike and El had decided to sit together and watch it all while they talked with each other. Content with each other's presence alone.

"How was school?" El asked.

"Eh." Mike responded with a shrug. "Still getting used to it. High school is a bit different than what Nancy told me about."

"I wish I could go." El said as her face fell.

"Don't be sad about it. School isn't all that fun." Mike assured her.

"It's not?"

Mike shook his head. "It's only fun depending on the friends you have there, and if you have cool teachers. If it weren't for Lucas, Dustin, Will, and even Max there, school would be super boring."

"Really?"

"Yup. You're not missing anything."

El smiled at him and turned back to watching everyone do their own thing. Her eyes ended up landing on Dustin and Lucas while they fooled around with the football, popping another question in her mind.

"What're they throwing around?"

"That's a football." Mike answered.

"Foot Ball?" El repeated. A little disgusted by the name. Mike could see that she was imagining something else entirely.

"No not like that. That's just the name for it. It's a ball used for the

sport. Not a body part."

El nodded understandingly. Grateful her friends weren't throwing around a limb.

"Do you play Foot Ball?"

Mike shook his head. "No. I wasn't really interested in sports. That, and I was never really good at them."

"I think you'd be good at it."

Mike couldn't help but smile from El's positivity. "Trust me, I wouldn't. There's a certain amount of skill and muscle that you need for Football. Skills and muscle that I have none of, not to mention."

"You're smart." El stated. "I think that'd make you a better player in general."

Mike flashed her another smile. "It just might. Maybe one of these days I'll take you to one of the schools Football games so you can watch it. Sound good?"

El smiled back at him and nodded. Resting her head on his shoulder. "I'd like that."

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James had decided to walk home for the day. He didn't feel like going on the bus whenever he was coming back home. Mainly because he had no one to sit with and no friends he could talk to. He'd always come back home with nothing to do. Not even homework since he'd get it all done in class or just do it right away when he got back. That wasn't even counting the home he would come back to. He couldn't find a lot to be happy about in this town. Nothing to really cheer him up.

"Will, do a flip!" A voice suddenly called.

James whipped his head to the direction where he heard the voice. It was a voice he's heard before at school almost everyday.

"Lucas quit telling him to do that! He's gonna get hurt!"



James recognized that voice immediately. Fully facing the direction from where it had come from. "I know that voice. That's the guy that keeps staring at me. The guy at school that I always see with his friends."

A thought came across James's mind to just keep walking and get back home. But seeing that he had nothing better to do, or anyone else to see, he succumbed to his curiosity. Slowly making his way to Mike's backyard.

He got closer to the group and found a spot where he could watch them without notifying them that he's there. He recognized everyone else who was with Mike while they were hanging out and doing their own thing. He watched Lucas and Dustin play Football in their own creative ways. Shortly moving his attention to Max who was trying to persuade Will to not try to backflip off the skateboard. Then he finally moved his attention to Mike. Noticing he was just sitting down in the midst of it, watching everyone else like a parent almost. James noticed he was accompanied by a girl who he's never seen before.

"That's new." He said to himself. "I wonder who that is. I don't think she's with them at school..."

He shortly cut off his train of thought. More captivated by all the fun the group was having. All the laughter, excitement, and good energy in the air. He completely envied it. Wishing he could be apart of it and enjoy it with them.

"Will catch!" Dustin yelled chucking the football towards Will who he thought was open. But Will wasn't open. He was too focused on keeping his balance on the skateboard to hear Dustin alert him about the ball coming his way.

James saw it heading towards him quickly, feeling an urge to warn him about the oncoming projectile but not wanting to risk being seen by the group.

"Will! Duck!" Mike warned, suddenly getting Will's attention. Will looked up and spotted the ball spiraling towards him, instinctively jumping back to avoid getting hit. But in his state of utter panic he had forgotten that the only stable ground he was standing on was a

board on four wheels, instantly slipping off, knocking Max back, and falling onto his back hard. Despite the violent fall Will just experienced, the ball was somehow still heading for him. Will didn't have much knowledge or experience when it came to Football or catching one spiraling towards him. He turned onto his stomach and covered his head with his forearms, believing that was the best thing he could do in the situation.

Mike was already getting up to help his friend. He didn't know if he was going to catch the Football with his lack of experience or just block Will from it's painful impact and take the hit himself, but he didn't care, he was gonna put full effort into it. James watched Mike start to make a run for Will, but he realized that he wasn't gonna get to him before the ball was, it'd all be in vain.

But right before the ball was going to hit Will it stopped, just a few feet away from hitting him in the head. James rubbed his eyes trying to make sure his eyes weren't deceiving him. He stared harder at the situation before him and realized that they weren't. The ball was being suspended in the air by an invisible force. Just sitting there.

Everyone froze immediately, even though they were used to seeing El use her powers it was still amazing to watch.

Mike glanced over at El, seeing her staring at the Football intently with blood trickling down from her nose.

James's eyes widened as the ball lifted higher into the air from El's control. With a jerk of her head, she sent the ball flying off yards away from everyone.

A gasp escaped James lips accidentally, he clasped a hand to his mouth as fast as he could, hoping no one heard him.

The Party turned to the source of his gasp instantly. Dread setting in everyone when they realized someone else had watched El use her powers.

"Oh no." Mike said, meeting eyes with James. "Hey, hey you!"

James turned and ran as fast as he could. Hearing footsteps and

clamoring behind him.

He was beyond scared. Beyond terrified. He's never seen anyone do what El did. Not even mentioning what she might do to him if they catch him. His running ended up carrying him to the woods, running straight into them. He could hear Mike screaming for him to stop numerous times. But he didn't dare stop or look back, he jumped, ran, and pushed through bushes and whatever else that wasn't rooted into the ground and solid that was in his way. His eyes saw a junkyard a little further down from where he was running. He glanced back to see if his pursuers were still behind him. To his dismay they were. Hot on his trail trying not to lose him. He sprinted even harder to the junkyard, seeing it as his last hope.

He finally made it to the junkyard after an exhausting chase but stopped dead in his tracks when he looked around at the barren field. There was nowhere else to run. No reason to hide considering the Party was right behind him. He tried catching his breath while he thought of another escape route. Starting to hear the closing in footsteps stop.

"Please, stop!" Mike shouted at him out of breath.

James turned and looked at him a bit defensively. He was too tired to run again, facing all of them this time.

"Look we just wanna talk." Mike urged.

"Talk?! You just wanna talk?! After what she did?!"

Mike cautiously advanced towards James. "I know what you saw wasn't something you see normally. I understand you're probably a little scared."

"A little?!" James repeated.

Mike gave James a small shrug. "Ok bad choice of words. I'm sure you're very scared right now. Just stay calm okay? Don't run. We don't want you telling anyone about this."

"Or what?!" James asked. "Are you gonna have that...that freak torture me or something?!"

El's brow furrowed, growing an intense glare at the boy. Mike held out a hand to stop her before she did anything to him.

"El, no!" He turned and met James's eyes again. Getting closer to him. "New kid, look, we don't want any trouble. We just ask that you talk to us and let us explain everything."

"Hell no! You guys are freaks! Stay away from me!" James yelled back.

"Look I know what it's like to be the new kid. We can all be friends it's okay. We were just like you." Mike replied.

James glared at Mike angrily all of a sudden. Offended by his words. "You don't know *anything* about me. You don't know what it's like."

"No I do! Trust me I do!" Mike persisted. He brought his hand up to James's shoulder to try and reassure him, unknowingly setting an opposite effect on the boy.

"You don't have to be alone anymore. You can be friends with us. We won't hurt you."

James's glare only hardened at him, clutching his hand and throwing it off his shoulder. "You. Don't. Know. ME!"

Everything happened so fast. The sound of a balled up fist connecting to someone's cheek echoed through the still air. Mike's body collapsed against the ground. His face throbbed in pain from the sudden hit. He wiped his nose spotting smeared blood on his hand. El ran to his aid and knelt down to check on him.

Dustin tried to push James back to keep the boys separated from one another, hoping to at least prevent another attack from him. But that only stoked James's fire and gave him a new target. He started to throw punches towards Dustin, hitting him in the face, chest, and stomach. Attacking too viciously for Dustin to keep him from Mike, let alone defend himself. Even doing so much as giving Dustin new bruises for trying to stop the situation from getting worse. His screams of pain could be heard through the punches making them sound more painful than they looked.

El was giving James a death glare. He hurt Mike and was now attacking Dustin viciously, she had enough of it. She was ready to unleash her abilities and make this boy pay.

Mike could read the look on her face and knew instantly something very bad was about to happen.

"El. El don't."

Dustin covered his head to protect himself from the flurry of punches being sent his way. One by one hitting his arms even harder than the one before. But the flurry had suddenly ceased completely. He slowly opened his eyes to see El glaring at something his way.

He looked behind himself and saw James suspended in the air, frightened to death.

"W-w-h-how? W-what's going on?!"

"El stop!" Mike yelled.

El's brow furrowed more as she increased her concentration. A loud, unnerving pop could be heard coming from James's shoulder. A scream of agony came from the boy. His wrist began twisting on its own and spawning a few more cringing pops. James screamed louder, squirming in place as he did.

"El stop you're hurting him!" Mike yelled again.

James's form was thrown unto the ground, still paralyzed in El's control.

She stood over his body and gave him a menacing glare.

"P...please.." James pleaded. "Please don't..."

El angrily focused again. This time her concentration zeroed in on his head.

James could feel a force begin to take a hold of his brain. Slowly giving him a migraine that only grew worse in pain.

"AAAAGGHHHH!"

"EL LET HIM GO! YOU'RE KILLING HIM!" Mike yelled.

"No!"

"EL HE'S JUST A KID! YOU'RE GONNA HURT HIM BAD IF YOU KEEP GOING!"

"I DON'T CARE!" El yelled, turning back to Mike. "HE HURT YOU GUYS, HE HAS TO PAY!"

"AAAAGGHHHHH! PLEASE!"

"SHUT UP!" El's words amplifying the migraine as she turned to James.

James screamed louder, tears streaming down his face from the searing pain inside his head.

Dustin, Lucas, Will, and Max could only look on in horror at what was unfolding before them.

"EL PLEASE STOP! IF YOU WON'T STOP FOR HIS SAKE THEN DO IT FOR ME!"

El silently glared at James, still wanting to avenge her friends for what he did. But if there was anyone she would do anything for outside of her other friends, it was Mike. Even though giving James mercy was the last thing on her mind to do, she would do it if Mike wanted her to. She hesitantly mentally let go of James's body, allowing him to finally move.

He cupped his hands to his throbbing head and rocked side to side on the ground whimpering from the immense pain he experienced.

Mike finally stood up and grabbed El by the shoulder. She glanced at him before her eyes hatefully stared back at James.

The pain was too much for James's body to handle, within seconds after it had stopped he felt his consciousness slip away. The Party being the last thing he saw before blacking out completely.

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That's chapter one for ya. Pretty hectic. I have a feeling you guys don't like my OC right about now, I totally understand that. Trust me though, he'll come around. I feel like this chapter was pretty short though, in my opinion at least. I'm hoping the next chapters after this will be longer than this one every time I upload. We'll see. Anyways I hope you guys enjoyed the first chapter! Feel free to Review and let me know how you felt about it! Follow and Favorite if you wanna see more! Til' the next one!

## 2. Chapter 2: Joining The Party

I'm back with another chapter rather quickly! Sadly I don't think I'd be able to continue to upload chapters fast due to my busy schedule, but I will try the best I can to do so. I kinda feel like the first chapters to ANY of the stories that I write are kinda bad and that the story doesn't start to pick up until the later chapters. I feel this puts readers off and makes them not wanna read the story anymore. Incase this is the case for any of the readers reading this story now, please bare with me. I assure you, the writing will get better as the chapters go on. Anyway, aside from my rambling, I hope you guys enjoy the chapter!

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James awoke to voices of other kids talking amongst themselves. He slowly opened his eyes, blurry apparitions filled his vision. It took him a few moments to fully adjust to his surroundings and for his vision to clear up. But dread filled his stomach once he recognized kids he saw earlier standing before him. His eyes flickered from person to person until they met the unforgiving eyes of El. She was standing a little further back than everyone else with Mike by her side to calm her. But her gaze was as hostile towards him as it had been when he hit Mike and Dustin.

"No...no!"

James attempted to stand up but felt a sharp pain shoot through his head and immobilize him.

"El, let him go." Mike spoke, softly grabbing her wrist.

"It's not me. His head must still be sore from the ordeal."

"What...happened? Where am I? What did s-she do to me?"

Mike moved closer to James to calm him down. "Listen, just stay down. You're still in pain."

James lifted up his left hand to find his wrist wrapped up in hard gauze. There was a dull pain manifesting where his wrist was in the



gauze. That must've been the result of El twisting it so far.

"Y-you could've killed me..."

"Maybe I should've." El threatened advancing toward James. Mike held her back before she could get close to him. He stared into her eyes and shook his head. "El, he's had enough."

She huffed and crossed her arms.

"She lifted me up into the air...twisted my wrist...started messing with my brain...how?"

Mike and El looked at each other realizing James knew about her powers.

"Y'know, she wouldn't have done that if you didn't go batshit on us." Dustin suddenly spoke.

James looked down in shame for his actions. "I...didn't mean to..."

"Looked like you did to me." Lucas spoke.

"Me too." Will said.

"New kid, there's a reason why we brought you here. Outside of the fact that you needed medical attention, we needed to talk to you about what you...saw."

James looked at Mike nervously. "About what she can do?"

Mike nodded.

"Are you guys gonna keep me in this basement to make sure that I don't tell anyone?"

"No no, we aren't gonna do that."

"Then...what are you gonna do?"

Mike knelt down to James eye level on the couch. Close enough for him to notice a red mark on his face where he punched him.

"We need you to promise us that you won't tell anyone about what you saw."

"Nobody at all." Dustin jumped in.

"Not even your parents." Lucas added.

James lifted up his sprained bandaged wrist. "What am I supposed to tell them about this then?"

"Don't worry." Mike said. "We'll handle that when we get you back home."

"Back home? You guys are really trusting me not to tell anyone?" James asked.

Everyone except for El nodded.

James felt some newfound responsibility slam into him. He was almost honored that these kids were trusting him to keep this whole thing a secret, despite their more than rocky start.

"Wow..."

Footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs. A high Schooler with long thick hair, being none other than Steve Harrington, came walking down the stairs and joining everyone.

"Ok what was it that you guys needed-" He stopped mid sentence when he met eyes with James. "Who's that?"

"The new kid." Dustin said. "That's what we called you for."

"The new kid?" Steve said skeptically. "Ok why is he here?"

"He saw El using her powers and kinda went nuts on us when we tried to talk to him. Then El got mad and used her powers on him." Dustin explained.

Steve walked up to James and further inspected the boy. "So...what exactly happened to him?"

"Well..." Dustin drifted off taking a look at James himself. "He's got a sprained wrist and a migraine."

"That it?"

Dustin took a moment to reflect on the situation from earlier. Remembering the first pop that came from James's body. "Check his shoulder."

Steve quickly tapped James's shoulder. Forcing a moan of pain to escape the boys lips.

"Yea he had a dislocated shoulder too." Dustin added.

Steve stood up and rubbed his forehead. "Guys what am I supposed to do with this kid? He's not horribly beat down but he's still pretty banged up. I can't just drop someone's kid off at their house when they look like this! His folks would probably call the cops on me!"

"They're not gonna call the cops, Steve. C'mon you're being ridiculous." Dustin assured.

Steve raised an eyebrow at Dustin. "Am I?"

"Steve look, we just need to get him home tonight so his parents don't go looking around thinking their son is missing."

Steve gazed at James again thinking about the idea of taking him to his house. He didn't like the odds he was given, but at this time he was the only one able to get James home without getting their parents involved in this situation. They especially didn't want Hopper finding out someone saw El using her powers. Steve rolled his eyes and groaned. Turning back and walking up the stairs.

"I can't wait til you guys turn 16 and start driving! C'mon let's go."

"I'll go with you guys." Mike said. He turned to El and saw that she still looked at James with the same glare she had before. "I'll be back okay?"

El met Mike's soft gaze and nodded. "I'll be here."

Mike flashed her a small smile then waved James over. "C'mon lets get you home before somebody gets worried."

James got up from the couch and followed Mike up the stairs. Feeling El's glare loom over him as he left.

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"We really need you to keep this a secret."

"I get it, I understand." James said. Feeling like he's heard Mike say that for the millionth time.

"No I'm serious. If anyone finds out, El could be taken. She's been taken before and she doesn't wanna go through that again. We don't want her to."

"We?"

"Me, the group of friends you saw, basically everyone she knows."

James glanced at Mike confused. "Why? What happened when she was taken?"

Mike felt himself getting unnerved just remembering what El would tell him about being stuck in the lab.

"Horrible things happened. They used her, tormented her, and hurt her in ways that made her cry just telling me about it. They seem to be gone after what occurred last year, but I'm not taking a risk with those people."

James felt bad for El. Despite the fact she could've put him in the hospital with just a slight jerk of her head, he could understand the pain she must've gone through when she was with those people.

"Wow I can't even imagine what she had to experience when she was with them."

"Me either."

After that conversation most of the ride was silent. The only moments of dialogue was James telling Steve which was to go since he knew

where his house was from where they were. But even while Mike was silent and James was being virtually left of the hook, he still felt a nag of guilt in the back of his head. He let his anger control his actions earlier today when all he had to do was remain calm and not lash out. And he was being reminded of it every time he looked at Mike, the one who trusted him the most, with the mark he left on his face. It was going to take a while for him himself to get over it.

After a few more minutes of driving they made it to James's house. A decent sized home, average lawn, and a 1970s convertible Cadillac sitting in the driveway.

"Alright, lets go kid." Steve said exiting the car.

James opened the door to leave but felt a hand grab his wrist and prevent him from leaving the car, hearing Mike's voice.

"New kid."

He turned and met his gaze.

"We're trusting you with this." Mike reminded.

James nodded. "I know."

Mike gave him one last trusting glance before letting his wrist go.

Steve was already at the door waiting for someone to answer while James walked to him.

A middle aged African American woman opened the door seeing James and then looking at Steve with a confused look.

"Hi ms, I'm with the Hawkins Baby Sitter Club. I was driving through the neighborhood when I saw your son being attacked by a handful of bullies in the area. He's a little banged up but it's nothing a few weeks won't heal up."

The woman looked at James and looked over him in concern. "Oh James! Are you hurt?"

"Just a little, Mom. I'm fine."

"Oh thank you, thank you for bringing him home!"

"No problem mrs uh..." Steve trailed off not knowing her name.

"Willard. Charlotte Willard." She answered shaking his hand.

"Mrs. Willard. It's no problem at all just doing my job."

Mrs. Willard said her goodbye before bringing her son in and closing the door.

Steve came back to his car and drove off shortly after with Mike.

"How'd it go?" Mike asked.

"Perfect, just told her some bullies in the area did it and that he'll be fine."

Mike nodded and sighed getting the hardest part out of the way.

"By the way, Mike, are you sure about trusting this guy? From what I heard your little friend did to him I'm sure he deserved it. What makes you so ready to trust him with this info?"

Mike shrugged genuinely out on a limb at this point.

"I dunno. I'm just hoping he keeps his word and keeps El safe."

Mike didn't know the kid at all, didn't even know that much about him at school. But there was something about him that Mike trusted. Something that was telling him that James was a good kid on the inside, and was able to be trusted. He'd just have to hope that gut feeling wouldn't be out of line this time.

---

The next day at school, it was The Party's lunch time, which they all had together. They all sat at the same table and tried to forget about what had unfolded the other day with James. El was with them today too, Hopper felt it may have been time for her to finally go to school since she was getting older and could use the social help and experience. She was shadowing Mike throughout the day because she was brand new. Hopper had also requested the principal to allow her

to do so since El wanted Mike to show her around rather than find everything out herself because she trusted Mike the most when it came to new experiences. She was enjoying the day so far since Mike was teaching her everything she needed to know about her first day at school. He wanted to make it a special day for her since it was her first day. It was always fun teaching El, she was like a sponge of knowledge. Constantly learning and soaking in information.

She hadn't seen what lunch was like at school, only back at home when Hopper would let her know lunch was ready. But she grew to like school lunch better because she was able to sit with her friends the entire time.

Around the corner, in the lunch line, walked out James. He was also in his lunch period at the time. Keeping his promise and staying silent for The Party and mainly El's sake.

He spotted Will, Dustin, Lucas, Max, Mike, and El all sitting together at their own lunch table. Collectively laughing and talking with one another. He realized how he had failed to apologize about his actions yesterday. He could still see the mark where he punched Mike in the face and the bruises Dustin had on his body that weren't being covered up by his clothes. If there was anything he could fix and put right at this moment it was this. He found himself nervously walking over to their table, his heart rate slowly increased each step he took.

It began racing faster when El's eyes were the first ones to spot him, her expression dropped instantly catching Mike's attention. Mike noticed James coming closer and soon everyone else watched as James approached them.

"Um...hey...I uh...I never really apologized about attacking you guys the other day."

"Yea you really didn't." Dustin said bluntly, earning a nudge from Lucas.

"I really didn't mean to just start going crazy on you and Mike. I'm so sorry about that."

"It's fine. As long as you didn't mean it." Dustin said.

"I didn't! I've had a lot of stuff happen with my family recently and it just kinda got to me in the moment. I shouldn't have yelled at you guys either, that was rude, and..." He met eyes with El who still looked like she was visualizing throwing him around like a rag doll.

"And I didn't mean to call you a freak either. I understand that was harsh and really uncalled for."

El didn't even respond to his apology. She just turned her attention back to her food and started playing with it. It was still clear she was harboring no love for James.

"It's alright, we all accept your apology." Mike said.

James nodded feeling some weight lifted off his shoulders. "Thank you."

He turned to find the table he always went to when he went to lunch. The empty one, where he felt the most comfort at. He couldn't lie to himself though, a small part of him was hoping that these kids he met would become his new friends in this town. But he already knew he messed that chance up from his actions the other day. He figured there wasn't any hope anymore at this point. But as he was walking he felt a hand grab his shoulder and pull him from his thoughts.

"Hey, you wanna sit at our table?"

James turned around and saw Mike staring back at him. Genuinely surprising him.

"I-I don't know...after all that happened yesterday.."

"You already said sorry about that. We can start off on a new foot this time."

"R-really?"

"Yeah. I'm Michael Wheeler. But you can call me Mike." He offered his hand.

James looked down at his hand and smiled. Happily shaking it. "I'm James. James Willard."



"Nice to meet you, James."

"Likewise."

Mike started bringing him back to the table. "C'mon, I'm sure everyone else is gonna wanna meet the real you."

James could feel some butterflies enter his stomach from this, but only because he was finally being involved in a group for once. He'd never had this many friends, let alone one, to talk to.

"Guys I think we should add him to the group. He's a new kid just like Max was, and personally I think he'd be a great addition."

Mike was met with neutral looks from everyone, mostly since they weren't too sure on how to react to a new member given what had happened yesterday but they were willing to try it. El however wasn't too keen on welcoming James to the group.

"James, this is Lucas and Dustin." Mike gestured to the two boys respectfully and they waved back to James.

"That's Will, and that's Max." Mike said allowing them to greet James back.

Then there was one left. The one that wasn't very happy about this new addition at the slightest.

"And this is El." Mike said with a smile.

El silently glanced at Mike and then James before moving her attention back to her plate.

"I think she still hates me." James whispered.

"She'll come around. Everyone, this is James!"

They all collectively greeted him by name this time. Making a smile appear on his face.

"Welcome to The Party, James!" Mike greeted, gesturing to an open seat that was next to him and on the opposite side of El's seat next to

Mike.

James happily sat down, finally making friends in this new town and in general. He couldn't believe how this group of kids his age trusted him so much. Allowing him to go back home the night before knowing their secret, and now letting him into their group. He knew now why Mike had kept staring at him previously. Mike had been in his shoes before as the new kid with no one to talk to. He understood how lonely school can be, and remembering how happy he was when Will became his first friend he knew he had to make sure the next new kid wouldn't go through that.

"So, James," Dustin spoke grabbing the boys attention. "When it comes to being apart of The Party everyone in it needs to know everything about what happened two years ago. How we met El, and why things are so weird around here."

"Wait t-there's more? To all the crazy things that happen?"

"Hell yes. A lot more. We haven't even told you about the Demodogs yet."

"Demodogs?" James's brow furrowed from uttering the unfamiliar and terrifying word.

Dustin nodded. "Viscous little creatures that mauled anything in sight!"

Max kicked Dustin's foot underneath the table trying to grab his attention.

"Ow! What was that for?!"

"Really? You're gonna tell him everything?" Max asked.

"Well if he's gonna be part of The Party then he should know!" Dustin defended.

"But now? Right now with all these other kids around us?"

Dustin looked around at the countless other students at the other tables. Minding their own business and talking with their friends.

"They aren't listening."

Max rolled her eyes. "If you *really* wanna tell him because you think it's super important then fine. Just keep it down so no one else hears you."

Dustin switched his gaze back to James. "Ok, so this all started when Will went missing."

James ate his food and watched Dustin start breaking down the story, it was entertaining like watching a movie. Dustin went over everything that happened. From the moment when Will went missing to El closing the gate to the Upside Down. James took all the information in and tried his best to digest it. Finding some of it a bit hard to believe.

"Wait how'd you meet El?" James asked.

"Oh right I kinda skipped over that. We found her one rainy night while looking for Will. She was super scared and had nowhere to go so we brought her to Mike's house. That's when we first started getting to know her."

James nodded. Replaying the story over and over inside his head.

"That sounds really crazy. I'm not gonna lie, it's kinda hard to follow."

"Trust me." Max interrupted. "I was just as skeptical as you when Lucas told me, a bit more skeptical actually. But then I saw everything, starting with those damn Demodogs."

"And that's not even mentioning El's powers." Lucas added silently.

James leaned closer to Dustin looking to ask only him something. "So...if El has these powers how did she get them? Where did she come from?" He whispered.

Dustin glanced at El before meeting James's curious eyes again. "I don't think she would want me to tell you. She doesn't really trust you yet."

James sighed and looked down Unenthusiastically. "I'll bet."

"She's gotta get used to you I guess. She still has to cool off from yesterday."

James had no doubt about that. She was the angriest out of the whole group that day, even *after* the whole ordeal had ended. He'd be lucky enough for to even *think* about forgiving him, let alone actually accept his new membership in The Party. He was just going to have to accept the consequences to his actions.

The bell suddenly rang, ending their lunch period. James stood up almost instantly after hearing it.

"Well I guess I'll see you guys later."

"Wait where are you going?" Will asked.

James stopped in his tracks and faced the group a little confused. "To class?"

"Don't we all have the same class next period?" Mike asked.

James shrugged. "I think so?"

"Then let us walk with you. We're all going to the same place."

James watched everyone throw their food away, afterwards starting to walk to their class.

"You have friends now, you're not gonna walk alone anymore." Mike said. "Just walk with us."

James was shocked. He wasn't used to being included in anything ever. This was all a new experience for him but an exciting one nonetheless. A smile started to grow on his face before he caught up with The Party and walked with them to their next class.

---

School had ended rather quickly after their lunch period. The whole Party was beginning to leave the school and head to their bikes. Will noticed James starting to head a separate way by himself.

"Hey James!" He called grabbing his attention. "We're gonna hang out

for a while at the arcade, wanna come with?"

"Oh, uh I don't know if I should go with you guys."

"Why not?" Will asked.

James shrugged. "I dunno, I feel like I could ruin the experience cause I'm new."

"What? Will asked almost laughing. "That's ridiculous, it'll be *exciting* because you're new! Trust me it'll be fun."

James chuckled to himself. He felt like he was being treated like a child, but in a good way. In a way being taught what it was truly like to have friends who wouldn't desert you. Even though he had just joined their group that day, he felt like he'd been in it for years already. Though, it was still going to take some getting used to.

"Alright fine."

Will smiled and walked with him to the bike racks.

"Ok guys," Dustin spoke. "We gotta remember to not spend all of our money on the games this time. Take things a little bit slower. Not to mention to-" He suddenly paused, clutching his stomach. Alerting everyone.

"Dustin, you okay?" Lucas asked putting a hand on Dustin's back.

Dustin was about to reassure everyone that he was fine, but a powerful force overcame his abdomen, he doubled over and ended up vomiting clear fluid. Some of The Party tried to look away since it wasn't a very pretty sight. Lucas himself found it hard to not turn away and not watch, but he stayed there and rubbed his friends back while plugging his nose. Thankfully the fit didn't last very long, ending in only a few seconds. Mike handed Dustin some napkins that he had grabbed earlier from lunch to wipe his face.

"Thanks." Dustin uttered using them and trying to catch his breath.

"Is he ok?" James asked looking at Dustin concerned.

"Yea, I think he just got a little sick from his lunch earlier. Must've been old bread he used or expired mayo." Will simplified. "Guys, let's bring him back to the school and get him some water."

Lucas, and Mike helped Dustin up and into the school while everyone followed.

But something small was in the fluid that came out of Dustin. It squirmed for a few seconds before starting to slither off in the grass away from the school.

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**Classic cliffhanger to end the chapter. I hope you guys see that James isn't a bad kid like how he was in the first chapter, he was just in a bad place, mentally. The Party is starting to see some good in his after his apology in this chapter, everyone except El...she's not so big on second chances. You guys also saw a character outside of The Party finally in this chapter, the other great characters will start to show up too so don't worry I just haven't got around to showing them yet. I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter! Feel free to Review and let me know your thoughts on it! Follow and Favorite to stay posted on future chapter uploads and to read more! See ya in the next one!**

### 3. Chapter 3: First Day

I hate the fact that I have to apologize over and over again for not uploading. I'm soooooo sorry to the people who have been waiting for The Loud House Sportsmanship! So many things came up since I was finishing High School, Finals kicked my ass, life in general lol. But since January I have been writing non stop trying to upload this chapter. I honestly hope it will never take me longer than one month or two to upload anything here. The wait has been unreal to say the least. Once again I apologize to all of my fellow Loud House readers for the tremendous wait. I will upload the next chapter for Sportsmanship whenever I can. Don't know how soon it will be, but I don't plan on taking another 3-8 months to do so. Also I'd just like to say that anyone who's trying to bash me on trying to write other stories and trying to tell me to only write for Sportsmanship can screw themselves. I'm pretty sure it was only one person with multiple guest accounts who was saying that in the reviews, but regardless you need to chill the hell out. I'll write for whatever I wanna write for. Hell this response is as late as this chapter, but my case still stands. Take that negativity elsewhere. Anyway, this chapter was kinda rushed but it's probably my longest one since it stands at around 13,900-14,000+ words. If there seems to be a lack in good writing material it's because I was trying to get this chapter uploaded since months and months had passed by. Anyway, hope you enjoy this chapter!

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The morning air was filled with the smell of breakfast. Hopper had gotten up early to make him and El a good meal to start their day off. Setting plates down with bacon, sausages, eggs, and even eggos.

"Kid!" Hopper called over his shoulder. "Wake up! Time for breakfast!"

He received a low but audible groan coming back from El's room. Today was her second day going back to the school but the first one where she would be participating in class. However she was used to just sleeping in and waking up later for the day. As much as she

wanted to go to school and see her friends, she hated having to wake up so early.

"C'mon kid, food's not gonna eat itself. And I made your favorite!" Hopper said with a smile. He said the last part in a low yet musical tone, knowing She could smell the food.

Damn. He knew she couldn't resist eggos, let alone the other food he made from his better than average cooking. With one last groan El finally got out of bed and held her arms over her head for a long and relaxing stretch, shortly heading into the kitchen and meeting gazes with Hopper.

"Morning Sleeping Beauty." He joked. Earning a small chuckle from El.

"Good morning."

"Excited for your first day?" Hopper asked sitting down at the table.

"Yesterday was the first day." El said grabbing her plate of stacked breakfast and sitting at the table.

"Well," Hopper began. "That was only a shadowing day. Today you'll actually participate with everyone. Become an actual student."

El's brows furrowed in confusion as she ate her food. "Really?"

Hopper nodded. "Now with that said, we gotta lay down some rules for you since this is your first time in school and doing anything else outside of school." El sighed a little while she ate more of her food. She thought she was finally free of rules after Hopper had dropped the first three. But it looks like she was only breaching into stricter territory.

"Does there *have* to be more rules?"

"Yes." Hopper emphasized. "High School is a whole different ball park. Bad things can happen there if you aren't careful, trust me I've been to the exact same school you went to, it can be rough. And venturing around outside of the house when you're normally inside can be very different from what you expect and what you're used to."



El had a hunch that Hopper was over exaggerating her first year in High School. He tended to do that to new things to make her a little more cautious about new experiences. All it could manage to do however is just startle the girl.

"Rule 1: Absolutely no usage of your powers in public."

Already botched *that* rule...

"What if I'm defending my friends? What if someone gets hurt?"

Hopper rubbed his chin realizing she had a point. "That depends on who's hurting who and how severe the situation is. We'll talk about that more later. Outside of those things, no using them at any other time."

El had an urge to tell him about the mishap from two days ago. Now would've been a great time to tell him as he was setting the first rule regarding her powers, despite his inevitable negative reaction to hearing it. That, and he deserved to know because he was her new guardian, her new Father. If El was getting into any trouble with her friends Hopper wanted to be the first to know. That wasn't even counting the fact that Hopper would most likely have a disapproving view of James, possibly even separating him from The Party. Despite El not having much of a problem with that she knew her other friends wouldn't like it given how James is starting to grow on them. This probably wasn't going to surface to Hopper anytime soon.

"I'm being *very* lenient with letting you use them around your friends when you're with them. But *never* in public, got it?"

El nodded disliking the rule but understanding that it was necessary.

"Alright, Rule 2: Don't be out anywhere late or by yourself."

Just like that El already had red flags up about the rule.

"What if I'm at my friends house? Or if I'm sleeping over?"

Hopper sighed. "It's fine if you're with your friends that you trust, but only at their houses. They shouldn't be out late by themselves either so being anywhere but their house with them is no excuse."

Seemed fair enough.

"And by friends you trust I mean; Dustin, Lucas, Will, Max, and Mike. You guys trust each other enough and they all know about the stuff that goes down in Hawkins. It's too much of a risk to be at anyone else's house."

Of course by risk he meant being discovered. After the Hawkins Lab shut down they were pretty sure the horrible men behind it were gone with it. But the public still wouldn't be able to handle finding out what El could do, and they still weren't sure if the people from the Hawkins Lab were *really* gone or not. El nodded again.

"Rule 3: Don't take rides from strangers, that includes going to school, getting home, or anywhere else. This should be common sense for you, but nowadays people are getting a bit too lenient with their kids. We had a kidnapper who drove around and tried to get kids to come into his vehicle. But it's not just them I'm worried about, though, it's the bad men that took you before."

El felt some discomfort after he said that. Not because of the rule itself, but the thought of being kidnapped and taken away by the bad men or other people just as bad as them. She wasn't going to just get into strangers cars anymore. Not even if they seemed nice at first like that man that took her to see her mother. She nodded seeing absolutely nothing to argue about.

"Rule 4: Get your schoolwork done!" Hopper said sternly. "If you wanna stay in school with your friends and do good you have to do all of your work and get good grades."

El rolled her eyes this time. Ever since the idea of El joining The Party in school was on the table Hopper would always bring up how important it was to maintain good grades. He wasn't wrong about it in any way, shape, or form. But it would waste no time in quickly getting tiring to hear over and over again, despite it's importance.

"Ok." She said with another nod.

"Alright." Hopper said. "Last one, Rule 5: If there's an issue at school or back at home or with your friends you need to tell me first. If I'm

not around or you aren't able to contact me then you tell Steve, Jonathan, Nancy, or Joyce."

El sighed. Bearing new objections but barely surprising Hopper. "Do we always have to? I'm capable of protecting myself and my friends just fine."

Hopper ran his hand down his face and groaned. "Jane." He spoke instantly silencing her. "I know you can. But you and your friends are just kids. There's only so much your powers can do to protect all of you guys at once. Besides, our job as the older half of the group is to watch over you guys and make sure nobody gets hurt."

El still wasn't too convinced on this subject. She knows they could handle their own in a bad situation. They've all been through so much together and they were starting to become young adults now. They weren't little helpless children like they were two years ago.

"But-"

"And." Hopper added. "As your father, it's my job to keep you safe."

He saw her look down and sigh. She knew all he wanted to do was protect her and make sure she can lead a normal life. She just wanted him to trust her enough to be by herself sometimes.

"One day you'll realize you aren't ready to be on your own. And that's fine. That's what we're here for. To take care of you and to be there for you, for all of you guys. Up until you're old enough to make your own decisions."

"But I *am* old enough." El protested.

Hopper smiled and got up from the table after he finished his plate. "Not to make all of them."

El groaned to herself.

"C'mon lets get you to school, you shouldn't be late On your first day."

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Hopper decided he was going to drive her to school until he could

find a different way to get her there. This way was the best way by far since he could make sure she got to school, not to mention he wouldn't be far from his job either. It wasn't long before they had driven up to the front of the school where the parents usually drop their kids off. Hopper handed El her new backpack while she unbuckled her seatbelt and got ready to leave. Hopper grabbed her by the shoulder before she did and turned her to face him.

"Be good at school, okay?"

El nodded. "I will."

"It's perfectly fine to be nervous since it's your first day. Just stay with your friends and pay attention in all of your classes."

"I know." El said almost rolling her eyes at the repetitive speech. "Behave, get my school work done, no powers unless necessary, call and let you know if I'm staying with my friends, and let you know if there's any problems." She unknowingly botched the order of the rules that he had set, but he was at least happy that she could remember them all for the time being. He smiled, pulling her into a tight embrace.

"Dad." El groaned, slightly embarrassed but feeling a smile form on her face.

"You're gonna do great. I know it." Hopper said .

El pulled back and beamed at him. "Thanks."

Hopper kissed her on the forehead. "I love you."

"I love you too." El said before opening the door and climbing out of the car.

Hopper watched her walk towards the front doors, a tear shedding from his eye from the feeling of being a father again. El turned to him before entering the school and waved to him. He waved back then slowly made his way to work.

It wasn't until El had turned around and saw countless teenagers walking about in the hallway. It was an utter swarm everywhere.

Teenagers of all sizes explored the indoor landscape, giving El looks as they passed by. This wasn't like how she thought it would be. It was a hell of a lot more intimidating once you were inside the school without anyone with you. El started taking very slow, small steps. Nervously looking around as she did. She was searching desperately for her friends, she knew they could make it better and show her where she had to go. Hell, she was almost fine with running into James of all people just so she wouldn't be walking alone. Her heart fluttered when her eyes rested on Mike in the distance seeming to be looking around for someone. She was about to yell his name to get his attention, but she doubted he would've been able to hear her due to the other teenagers walking around and talking to each other. But almost as if he could read her mind, he turned and met her gaze. A contagious smile formed on his lips shortly causing one to make its way onto hers. He wasted no time running to her.

"El! I've been looking for you. I thought you'd get here a little sooner."

"You've been looking for me?" El repeated.

Mike nodded. "Hopper told everyone you were going to actually attend today. I kinda broke away from the others to find you faster."

El knew that Mike understood how important this was to her. Everyone in The Party did, but Mike was different. He connected with El in a way that no one else did, understanding her on a deeper level. He knew how alone she would feel in an environment like this, not to mention knowing that she wouldn't know what to do.

"Mike, I'm kinda scared." El admitted grabbing one of his hands.

"I know you are." Mike replied gently squeezing her hand. "We were all scared when we first got here too. But you don't have to worry, alright? We'll be here to guide you, show you where to go and what to do."

El beamed at him. He always had a knack for calming her down and supporting her when she needed it the most. It was one of the things she loved about him. He was always there for her when she was having a new and scary experience, school being no exception

whatsoever.

"Thank you."

Mike shot her a toothy grin before tugging on her arm gently. "C'mon, let's go find the others. They're excited to see you finally enrolling at the school."

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Mike guided El and pulled her by the hand through crowds and groups of people. Rushing to make sure they would make it to their friends before the first bell rang to get to their classes. After a few sharp turns, and some occasional shoulder bumps, apologies and curses coming from Mike, they made it to the lunch room where the rest of The Party was at. Everyone's face lit up to seeing the two finally make it to the lunchroom.

"Found her, guys." Mike said with a smile. "Finally got the whole Party here."

James was the first to step forward and try to greet El. He wanted to at least attempt to change her view on him. "Hi, El." He said flashing a smile and trying to sound cheerful.

El slightly narrowed her eyes at him hatefully, silently judging him. Quickly turning to greet her other friends that all gave each other eyebrow raised looks.

James's smile slowly faded realizing her view of him barely changed or if anything got worse. "..never mind..."

Mike threw his arms around his shoulders and gave him a reassuring glance. "She's still mad about all that happened. It's not a huge deal, she just needs to cool off a little more."

James sighed. "Not all that surprised by it to be honest. I'm gonna hurry and head upstairs." He left Mike's arm and began walking in the other direction.

"Wait aren't you gonna hang out with us? The bell doesn't ring until another 5 minutes."

"I...gotta make up some work for my first class. Stayed up late last night." James bluffed. He continued to walk further until he vanished in the hallway of students.

"Is he okay?" Will asked.

Mike shrugged. "I think so. He said he had to go complete work since he was up late last night."

"That's odd, he told me he usually gets all his schoolwork done and never has homework."

Mike looked at Will with a quirked eyebrow. Both of them had a feeling something wasn't adding up at the moment.

"So El, ready for your first day of actual school?" Max joked. Earning a smile from El.

"I hope so."

"We'll help you, El." Lucas said confidently. "Trust me, as long as you do what you're supposed to do and stay out of trouble you'll be fine."

Though El couldn't help but to be a little scared, it was nice knowing her friends were going to be there every step of the way. It couldn't have been too hard since she shadowed Mike yesterday. The bell suddenly rang before anyone else could say a word. Panic slowly filled El's mind on what to do next. That signified the timer to get to the next class. But that was going to be a problem.

"Mike." El called wide eyed. "Where do I go?"

"Do you know your classes yet?" Mike asked.

El shook her head.

"Let's check your backpack. Maybe Hopper put your schedule in there."

El swung the backpack from her shoulders and opened it while her friends gathered to search with her. She dug into the bag, pushing past folders, binders, and her lunch, finally spotting and grabbing a

sheet of paper near the bottom. Hopper must've put it in first and forgot about it after filling El's backpack with everything she needed for the day.

"This?" El questioned holding the paper up.

"Yeah! That's it!" Mike said grabbing the sheet. "Let's see what your classes are."

He held the paper up so the whole group could read it. They tried to see who she had classes with, everyone was so eager to show her the ropes and teach her what to do in their classes.

"Oh cool we have first period together!" Mike exclaimed.

"Period? What's period mean for school?" El asked.

"Oh it's another way of saying classes. So first period would be your first class, second period of your second class, so on and so forth." Mike explained, generating a nod from El. "We both have Trig together!"

El's face twisted in confusion. "Trig?"

"It's another form of math. It's different from what Hopper taught you. But I can teach you how to do it."

El smiled at him then nodded.

"What's after that class?" Dustin asked curiously.

Mike eyed the letters underneath his class and read it accordingly. "Biology is her 2nd."

"Sweet!" Dustin exclaimed. "We have Bio together! You're gonna love it! We learn about animals, the way the human body works, nature, all types of stuff!"

El found Dustin's enthusiasm a little funny. She knew how much he loved science but often forgot that he would geek out anytime someone mentioned a form of science. She looked to the next class under that one, squinting at the words.



"English?" She spoke.

"Lucas and I have that class!" Will stated excitedly. "It's gonna help you with reading and writing a lot."

El was relieved with that statement. She found it irritating occasionally needing a definition for words she didn't know, especially for words people used regularly. "That's good."

El looked down at the next class and read the words a bit easier. Only questioning why the two words were put together in the first place.

"World History?"

Everyone looked at each other in excitement while El stared at them all in confusion.

"That's great!" Lucas exclaimed. "All of us are in that class!"

"Really?" El questioned, genuinely happy at the news.

Lucas confirmed it with a nod. "It's gonna be really fun with all of us in there! You'll learn all about the history of the US and how we came to be!"

El flashed him a smile before moving her gaze back to the sheet to read the next class off.

"S-spanish II?"

"Oh Spanish! Lucas and I have that one too." Dustin stated. "It might be hard to pick up at first but it's super easy once you get the hang of it."

"What is it?" El asked curiously.

"It's a language class." Lucas explained. "In there you learn Spanish which is another language outside of English. It'll be fun trust me."

El nodded again understandingly. Looking down at the next class her eyes lit up in joy. "Lunch? Oh lunch! We all sit together in that one right?"

They all nodded and smiled at her excitement.

"We're all in that period too." Mike confirmed with a smile on his face.

El was grateful for that. Lunch was the only "class" she knew she had throughout her whole schedule, and finding out she had it with all her friends was a huge relief.

She looked at the second to last class listed on her schedule. "Gym?"

"Will and I are in that one." Max said. "That's physical education. Or PE for short. We play sports in that class and do other stuff that help with physical growth and healthiness."

That one sounded a little more intimidating rather than simple. But El was willing to receive the challenge.

El looked at the last class listed and read it accordingly. "Study Hall?"

"We all have that one." Lucas stated. "It's kinda like a free time class, to socialize and do homework before school is over."

El nodded again having finally completed the list.

"Alright that's all your classes, there's at least two or three of us in each of them. They're all in different rooms too so you'll have to walk around the school to get to them, but you don't have to worry, we'll help you find them and memorize where they're at." Mike said. "Sound good?"

El nodded with a smile. "Yes."

"Ok now we all kinda have to run to our classes." Dustin pointed out. "Going over El's schedule kinda steamrolled all the time we had during passing period. I'll see you guys later."

Everyone agreed and said their goodbyes before dashing to their first class. Mike grabbed El's wrist and lead her to their class. "C'mon, El. We gotta hurry now before we're late."

"Late?" El questioned trying to keep up with Mike's rapid feet.

"When the first bell rings it means that a class is over or that the first class of the day is about to start. The Second bell means that the class has started and you should be in it. If you aren't in your class by the

time the second bell goes off then it means you're late." Mike explained.

"Is that a bad thing?" El asked.

"Well kinda." Mike replied. "Is ok being late a few times for you since you're new. But if you're late for more than a handful of times then you'll probably get a detention. That's when you have to stay after school in a classroom for an hour and a half for punishment. It's not fun."

El nodded understandingly. "I'll try my best to be on time."

"I know you will." Mike replied with another smile.

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Mike and El managed to rush into the classroom before the second bell had rung.

"Are we late?" El asked, concern growing on her face.

"No we aren't, don't worry." Mike reassured her.

"Mr. Wheeler." The teacher of the classroom called. "You were almost late today. I trust you have a good excuse seeing that you tend to be on time or early."

"Uh yes I do, Mr. Furner." Mike gently took El's hand and pulled her forward so that the teacher could see her. "This is El-err Jane Hopper. She's a very close friend of mine. It's her first day here, and I was just helping her get to class."

"Hopper? Chief's kid?" Mr. Furner asked.

Mike and El nodded.

"Well, Ms. Hopper, it's a pleasure to meet your acquaintance." He turned to the class and gestured to El. "Everyone, this is Jane. She'll be joining our class as a new student."

He turned to Mike and El with a small smile. "You two may take your seats now. Class is about to begin."

Mike had seemingly read El's mind, knowing what she was going to ask, he quickly lead her to two desks and gestures for her to sit down in one while he sat in the other.

"Seating doesn't really matter in this class." He silently explained while their teacher began a lecture. "In other classes you might have a seating chart where you'll have to sit in a certain spot every time you go to the class. But here you can sit anywhere."

El nodded understandingly and faced the front where the teacher stood. Ready to start her first class.

The lecture had gone on for almost half the class, El was doing her best to remember everything he said by writing it all down in a notepad Hopper had given her. She wouldn't have even thought of the idea had Mike not brought it up when he saw her just staring at the teacher while he lectured. He announced that he had finished the lecture and that the students were free to complete the homework assignment he shortly passed out.

Mike was quick to push their desks closer together and check on how she was holding up so far.

"El? Do you understand what we're doing?"

El did her best, and failed miserably, to give Mike a confident smile. "Yeah..."

Mike could read the worry on her face and in her eyes instantly. "You don't look so sure."

Realizing Mike could see through her bluff, El dropped the forged smile and sighed.

"I'm not. I barely have a clue about what ANY of this means. Dad taught me a lot of the regular math things. But we didn't really get to this kinda stuff."

"El I can teach you this. It's simple once you get the hang of it. Plus we can meet up at your place and study together incase you need more help."

Mike tried to shoot her a reassuring smile to comfort her. Only managing to partially comfort her. El stared back at the sheet of alien equations in front of her contemplating on her next move.

"What do you want to start on?"

El pointed to the first equation. "Whatever this is."

"Sin of 50 degrees?" Mike questioned.

"Yeah. That."

"It's simple. All you have to do is plug it into your calculator and you'll get the answer." Mike explained grabbing her calculator. He pressed the "sin" button shortly pressing "5" and "0" and then pressing "enter". Giving her the answer to the problem.

"There. It gives you a long decimal answer, but you only have to put down whatever is in the nearest hundredth decimal place, which is the second number unless under certain circumstances."

El's brow furrowed while she studied the answer. "So it's 0.766?"

"Well if the third number over, which is the thousandth for the decimal places, is above 5 then you round the number up that's before it and it becomes one number higher. So the answer would actually be 0.77" Mike explained.

El's expression lit up once the pieces began connecting into her head. "Oh! Ok I understand that!" Her eyes flickered to the next set of problems that used cos and tan. "What do I do with those then?"

"For cos you put cos in on your calculator instead, then do everything else normally. Same thing for tan." Mike explained again.

El nodded and felt a smile start to form on her face as she learned how to do the equations.

"That's it?"

"Well kinda. Later on we'll start doing it with triangles and stuff. But that's where SOH CAH TOA comes in."

El's brow furrowed in confusion. No doubt from the phrase Mike just threw at her.

"I'll explain it when we get to it, don't worry." Mike reassured before

she could even ask what it was.

El nodded understandingly and turned to work on the problems in front of her. Mike was happy to see her finally lighten up in the class, it only took a few pushes in the right direction to get her started and let her she still had seven more classes to go, and it was WAY too early to assume everything would go perfectly fine.

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The bell rang interrupting El and Mike's math session together. Mike helped her gather her things back into her bag before they left to her next class. Mike was sure he would've been late to his next class but he didn't care, as long as El needed help to get to her next class he would happily jump to the opportunity to help her.

"This is the class." Mike said. "I'll see you later in our other class, ok?"

He turned to leave but was instantly stopped in his tracks by a hand firmly grabbing his and turning his attention around.

"Wait!" El exclaimed. "How do you know your way around here so well?"

Mike shrugged. "After a while you get used to it. The classes all have numbers on them so you'll know which classes are where. Trust me they'll be easy to find after a few days in the school."

He turned and attempted to leave again but only felt El's grip tighten rather than lessen.

"El." He spoke in a groaning manner. "I have to get to my next class before I'm late."

"I know." El replied turning away and slightly blushing. "I...I just wanted to say 'thank you'. For helping me out so much on my first day in these classes. Helping me get started."

"Don't mention it, I'd do it regardless. But we still have a whole schedule to get you through." Mike said.

"I know." El said. "But you gave me enough confidence to go out of my comfort zone in these next classes. I'm grateful for it."

Mike smiled at her and nodded turning to leave again. Once again not feeling El's grip lessen.

He began to say her name again while turning back to face her, but he was interrupted by her lips pressing up against his abruptly. It was just like they were back to the Snowball again. The soothing peace of her presence and her smile. He hadn't kissed her like this since then, and he knew he'd missed it a lot ever since.

She slowly separated from him before he even contemplated about what happened. She couldn't help but giggle at the dazed look in his eyes.

"Wow." He uttered.

"Ok NOW you can go." El said smiling at him.

Mike shook himself out of his daze and nodded. "Oh! Right! See ya!" He exclaimed before running down the hall.

El smiled to herself before walking into her next classroom. Upon entering she scanned the room for Dustin, remembering him say that he was in that class too. After flickering from face to face she felt some relief upon finding Dustin's contagious smile. He greeted her with a wave and she sent one back his way.

"Glad you made it!" Dustin said. "Mike show you the way over here?"

El took the seat next to Dustin with no hesitation and nodded. "I kinda miss him already."

"I can tell." Dustin teased. "I saw your little 'moment' in the hallway."

El blushed again and tried hiding the smile on her face. She found it somewhat embarrassing knowing Dustin saw the two of them kids just now.

"It's been a while since you two kissed like that hasn't it?" Dustin asked.

"Yeah." El confirmed, smiling to herself. "But it was nice doing it again."

Dustin nodded understandingly. He was quick to gesture towards the

teacher in their class, a little excitement made its way on his face while he did it. "That's Mr. Clarke. He's gonna be our teacher in this class. Lucas, Will, Max, Mike, and I had him at our old school. Though Max only had him for one year. But the rest of us has had him for a while, he's a great teacher."

El looked astonished by the information. "Wow. How did he become your science teacher this year too?"

"He told me he got a promotion after we graduated from our old school, so he started working for the high school instead of the other one." Dustin explained. "That, or he just missed us too much."

El giggled out loud. Dustin always knew how to make her laugh, just as much as Mike did. Granted, a lot of his humor tended to be dry or so bad that it was funny. But to El his jokes were almost always funny. She hunched over to unzip her backpack and grab a new folder for the class. But her expression dropped when she sat back up and spotted someone coming into the classroom.

Dustin noticed the sudden change in her face instantly. "What's wro-oh..." he trailed off before gazing at who she was looking at.

James came walking into the classroom. He wasn't late but he was only half a minute from becoming late had he entered any slower. His eyes jumped from face to face as he traveled further into the room, trying to find Dustin. They went wide once he locked gazes with El suddenly. Surprising him enough to nearly freeze him in his place. He would've never guessed to see El scowling at him in any of his classes, let alone in such an early class. Thankfully Dustin took him out of his deer-in-headlights state by gesturing for him to sit next to him, on the opposite side of El. He hesitantly took the offer, attempting to avoid El's gaze on the way to the seat. He could feel her intense stare follow him all the way until he sat down. He could only imagine how upset she was getting finding out they shared a class together.

El and Dustin exchanged looks with one another. Not because of the obvious tension that manifested, but because of a new question that arose. They both noticed something was different about James, something physical. The way he walked into the class was unique. It wasn't because of any condition he had previously or something like that. But like he was ashamed of something, like he was hiding



something. Dustin snuck a glance at James's face to see if anything else was wrong that he hadn't seen yet. Nothing was wrong there. He scanned further down the visible parts of James while he sat down until he spotted something abnormal.

He felt his stomach drop upon seeing two bruises on the arm where he had the small wrist cast. He looked over at El and saw that she had realized they were there too. He cupped his hand over his mouth to make sure only she could hear him.

"Did...did you-"

"No." El replied quickly. "He didn't have that this morning. I haven't even used my powers on that specific spot either."

Dustin nodded and faced James again, tapping him on the shoulder and giving him a friendly smile once he met his eyes.

"You okay there, buddy?"

"Yeah." James replied nonchalantly. "Why do you ask?"

Dustin nodded to the bruises on his forearm. "It looked like something happened to you."

James gave Dustin a puzzled look before gazing down at his arm. His eyes widened upon seeing the bruises, attempting to hide his surprise. He stumbled on his words trying to find a reason for why those were on his arm, but that was only making Dustin's suspicions grow.

"Oh I just- uh.. stumbled on the stairs this morning and fell. Yeah, while I was running off to my class I slipped and landed on my arm."

Dustin nodded pretending to buy in the bluff. "Oh ok. Yeah the stairs do tend to get slippery when the janitors clean them."

He shot El a suspicious look, receiving a shrug in response. He had a feeling something was up, but he didn't exactly know what yet. Maybe this was something the group needed to know about later on, but class was starting now so it'd have to be discussed later.

"Good morning everyone." Mr. Clarke greeted in an energized voice. "Welcome back to Biology! We've got a lot of things to go over today

but before we begin, I'd like to announce that we have new student in the class."

El noticed the eyes in the room begin to shift and focus on her. She could feel herself easily tensing up nervously from it.

Dustin was the first one to react. He had a knack for reading expressions and could read El's just as good as Mike could, give or take specific emotions. He could easily tell she was too nervous to introduce herself to people she didn't even know.

"Her name is Jane Hopper. She's a great friend of mine and she's new to the school."

"Wow, didn't know Jim had another kid!" Mr. Clarke said surprised. "Welcome to Hawkins High! Glad to meet you! Although, I feel as though we've met before?"

El shook her head vigorously, suddenly remembering him from their encounter two years ago.

Mr. Clarke thought to himself momentarily before shrugging the thought off. "Well, anyway, it's a pleasure to have you in the class." He turned to the board and began writing. "Alright, class, lets begin."

"Thanks." El whispered to Dustin, smiling.

"Don't mention it." Dustin replied shooting her a smile in return. "It's always nerve wrecking on your first day."

No argument there.

"Just do your best to pay attention." Dustin instructed.

El nodded and readied herself to take notes.

Mr. Clarke started by going over Dominant traits and Recessive traits. It took him most of the class period to explain it since the students couldn't exactly understand it due to hearing it for the first time. Outside of Dustin, that is, he had little to no trouble understanding the new topic. He was making sure to write notes down for himself and for El incase Mr. Clarke went too fast for her to write it all down. And by the looks of it, it seemed like El could've used the help. She

looked completely lost in all this science talk. She'd hear a bunch of stuff close to this whenever her conversations with Mike had started to venture off into random thoughts, or if she asked him a question he could only answer with science. But he would normally stop in between explaining anything to her to make sure she understood what he was saying. Mr. Clarke was just running down the lecture too fast for her to understand anything. It'd also help if her knowledge wasn't so limited on almost all of her curricular courses. She scrambled to write down what he said but only to erase or scribble out everything she wrote since it didn't make sense to what he was saying. Mr. Clarke finished his lecture within the next minute and had already started passing out the homework assignments. El's features dropped disappointingly. She had barely wrote down any notes worth keeping, let alone understand the lecture as a whole.

Dustin nudged her arm suddenly, sliding his notebook to her desk. "Hey I know he was going kinda fast, he tends to do that sometimes, don't worry about it. Just use my notes, I made sure to write everything down, let me know if you have any questions."

El expression lit up and she couldn't help but almost jump out of her seat and give Dustin a hug. She could've kissed him on the cheek in that moment, but didn't after subconsciously noting that those were only reserved for Mike.

"Thanks Dustin!" She said, shortly grabbing his notebook and writing down his notes.

"No problem, El." Dustin said shortly turning his gaze to James. "Did you understand all of that?"

James nodded turning to meet his eyes. "Yeah, barely. Also..." He leaned back a little to check and make sure El wasn't listening, deciding it safe to continue silently after seeing her writing profusely. "I thought her name was El?"

"That's what we call her." Dustin explained. "Her real name is Jane. She was adopted by the Chief of police two years ago, that's why her last name is Hopper."

"Adopted?" James repeated, glancing around Dustin to gaze at El

again shortly coming back to Dustin's eyes. "I didn't know that."

Dustin nodded. "There's a lotta of stuff you don't know about her. Maybe she'll tell you one day."

James lightly scoffed with a smirk. "As if. Hates me, remember?"

"Give it time." Dustin assured. "She'll get over it."

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The class had ended once the bell rang again. El hurried to get all of her stuff back in her backpack and let Dustin lead her to her next class. She waited patiently at the door, avoiding other student's gazes as they passed her while Dustin said his goodbye to James. After a harsh minute of waiting she felt some relief wash over her once Dustin finally grabbed his things and met her at the door. He peeked at her schedule to find the room number, and started their journey to her next class.

"So how'd you like Biology?" Dustin asked with a friendly smile.

El huffed and shot him an exasperated look.

"It couldn't have been that bad?"

El shrugged. "It would've been worse if I spent another minute trying to write down everything Mr. Clarke said. But thankfully, you gave me your notes to copy from. So it wasn't all bad."

Dustin shot her a reassuring smile. He always loved to help others out when they were in need. El was definitely no exception, he'd be willing to go over a whole unit with her during an all-nighter if he had to. He knew today would be a bit of a bumpy road for her, but he also knew she had good friends with her to help make it easier.

"No doubt you'll have rough moments in your classes down the road. You just have to power through them or find another way around them. Once you learn how to do that, everything else will be smooth sailing."

El's brow furrowed while she tried to process the common saying. "Smooth sailing?"

"It's a common phrase people use. It means everything will be fine and there won't be anymore issues." Dustin explained. Sometimes he'd fail to remember that El had a decent but limited amount of English. She had gotten better at speaking and understanding it over the past year, but there were still plenty of words and phrases that caught her off guard despite how common they were to be heard. It was a good thing she was going to English class next. He knew she could use the help and would get as much as she needed there.

"Alright, here it is." Dustin spoke as they reached El's destination. "I'll see you at our next class."

El nodded understandingly and shot him a smile. "Thanks again for the notes and advice."

"You're welcome. See ya!" Dustin said before waving and departing within the sea of high schoolers.

El entered the classroom and scanned it for any familiar faces. She was quick to meet two that she knew very well. Grinning from ear to ear.

"Will! Lucas!"

The two boys caught El in their arms as she ran to embrace them.

"She missed us THAT much?" Lucas asked glancing to Will.

"I think she's still getting used to how long the periods are." Will replied. "Must've felt like years were passing by to her."

El pulled back and grinned at both of them. "Dustin showed me how to get here."

"He was in your class right?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah. Him and James."

Will and Lucas read her expression and instantly winced at each other.

"How'd...that go?" Will reluctantly asked.

El shrugged. "Ok I guess. He didn't say a word to me."

"I'm not surprised." Lucas remarked. "Regarding how you ignored him this morning."

"Not to mention that he's probably scared of you." Will added.

El shrugged nonchalantly. Completely contempt with that concept. "I'm fine with that."

Will and Lucas gave each other uncertain looks, both undoubtedly thinking the same thing.

"Well, I think it's best to let you know now that he'll be in a few of the classes we share together later on." Lucas said. "You're gonna have to deal with him inside and outside of school."

"Wait, 'outside'?" El repeated looking at Lucas incredulously. "What do you mean 'outside'?"

"Well, to be honest, he's starting to grow on most of us." Will admitted.

El raised an eyebrow in more disbelief. "He IS?"

The two boys nodded at her assuringly. "Even though we've only been talking to him for a few days, he's easy to talk to. He's actually a pretty cool guy once you get to know him. Just gotta get him over his shyness first." Will added.

El couldn't believe what she was hearing. They **LIKED** him? She had no clue what they were seeing in him that made him so likable. Her view on him barely changed. She had already made it painfully obvious how she felt about him, and yet, he was winning her friends approval? She didn't like it, but she knew there was no way around seeing his face at this point. She'd just have to swallow her hatred for him the best she could and do her best to not explode in his face or send him through a wall.

"Great." She sighed. "Lucas, how are you and Max?"

She watched as a smile grew on his face as he thought back to Max.

He always made the same face when he thought of her.

"Amazing." Lucas said dreamily. "I miss her whenever we're not in the same class and when we go home."

"I'm the same way with Mike." El admitted. "Guess parting ways with her is just as painful for you like it is for me?"

Lucas nodded. "But it's always refreshing to see her face."

"I feel the same with Mike." El agreed with a smile.

"I've seen both of you guys act like love sick puppies when you see them again. It's as cute as it is funny." Will said with a smirk.

"Y'know that reminds me," El said turning to Will. "You and Dustin need a girlfriend."

"A girlfriend?" Will repeated looking unsure.

"Or a boyfriend if that's what you're into."

Will chuckled a little from her comment.

"You and Dustin both seem really lonely. I think you guys are just missing someone, someone really special to you." El added.

"She's got a point. You guys always wanted one ever since middle school." Lucas said.

"Guys-

"Max and I can help you two find one! It shouldn't be hard!" El offered.

Will rolled his eyes and smiled. "How about we focus on getting you through the day first. Besides, the teacher just came into the room so class is about to start anyways."

El glanced over to the doorway to see if Will was trying to bluff his way out of this situation. But sure enough, the teacher was in the room ready to start. "This isn't over. We'll be coming back to this

topic." She warned with a serious but playful look.

"Find Dustin someone first. Then help me out." Will said smiling.

"Morning everyone!" The teacher announced. "Please take your seats!"

Will, Lucas, and El followed their directions and found seats right next to each other to sit at.

"Lucas and I already informed the teacher that you were a new student. We knew you'd probably be super shy if she asked you to introduce yourself in front of the class so we told him to give you a few days to get used to everyone first before you started talking to anyone." Will said.

El sighed in relief. "Thank you guys so much! I know these teachers are trying to be nice and all, but I'd rather not get introduced to the class. Two was already enough for me today."

"Yeah, we knew how you'd feel a bit uncomfortable about it." Lucas said. "We'll try to get everyone else in The Party to do the same for you in other classes."

El nodded understandingly with a smile.

"Get your books out. We'll be going through the first chapter today in class, then I'll have you read chapter 2 silently. Whatever you don't get done in chapter 2 will be homework for you to work on tonight."

El eyed Lucas and Will in worry. Seeing everyone including them take out their books. "Book? What book?"

"It's a book the whole class has to read. I'm sure Hopper bought it for you and put it in your backpack along with your other supplies." Lucas explained. "Check your bag, maybe it's in there."

El quickly yet silently opened her backpack and poked her head through the opening. Scavenging for the book everybody grabbed but not seeing a trace of it.

"What's the name of it?" El asked glancing back up to Lucas.

"To Kill A Mockingbird. It's by a writer named Harper Lee. It should



be the book with the man holding two children in his arms trying to protect them from a mob."

El looked through her bag, baring her best guess of the image from Lucas's description in her mind. After rummaging through for barely a few seconds her eyes had found the book sitting in front of all her folders and notebooks. El couldn't help but feel captivated by the book cover alone. She knew it was mostly art that brought the reader in from just looking at it, but when she was looking at it with her own eyes and pairing it with Lucas's description, it was like it spoke to her on another level. She could almost feel a connection to the book from sight alone. Seeing herself in the children that were hiding from the bad people. One of them even looked the exact same as El did when she first met Mike in the woods three years ago. It was almost nostalgic despite her past.

The teacher began to read out loud and start their session. It was a fast pace but El was more capable of keeping up with this subject. Given how much English she had learned over the year.

But within a minute of the teacher reading, he stopped. He searched among the seats of the students for someone to call on

"Abraham. You can continue from where I left off and choose someone else to read when you're done."

El once again gave Will and Lucas a worried gaze. "Do I have to read out loud?"

"No." Lucas whispered. "We told him that you'd have a bit of trouble reading out loud in class, so he's probably gonna have people skip you. No need to worry."

El nodded. She was able to relax and just listen for the first time today. Even though it was going to be uneventful and a bit bland, she could use it as a break. School wasn't as easy or as hard as she first imagined it to be. But then again this was only the beginning of the year. She's heard Mike talk about how subjects tend to get a little harder as the school year goes by. Only way to truly prepare for that was to study up on everything or brace for an onslaught of stress and bad grades. That itself sounded scary enough alone, but El knew she

had the comfort and aid of her friends which would've been more than enough.

After more than a dozen minutes of listening to other students read the class switched over and finished chapter two silently. El was doing a pretty good job reading on her own. All the times she read books with Hopper in their free time had paid off. It also helped with how gravitating the book was for El to read. She was already hooked into the story within the first chapter, and the second one was only adding onto the ongoing momentum. She was already sure about one thing, this class was going to be her favorite.

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"How was that one El?" Will asked as they walked to their next class.

"I liked it a lot. Especially when we had to read." El replied.

Will and Lucas shot each other smiles. "That's good to hear! All of us are gonna be in your next class, it's World History."

"History. I'll probably learn a lot in that class, huh?" El asked.

"Oh yeah." Lucas huffed. "A whole lot. But the teacher goes over everything slowly to make sure everyone can understand it. It'll be a breeze for you, trust me."

El gave him a confident smile and nodded.

They made it pretty quickly to the classroom and upon entering the room were greeted by the rest of the Party, who practically had their own tiny section in the corner of the rows of seats. All of them excitedly waving the three of them over. El shot them a warm smile and waved back as they walked to the group. But her smile was slowly replaced by a scowl upon realizing James was there with them, silently sitting the furthest away in the group. The scowl grew on her face.

"El?"

She turned to Lucas, who had already read her expression and processed the situation. "I know what you're thinking. You're just gonna have to deal with it. Like I said before; you're gonna see him a

lot. If you still don't want to talk to him then try your best to ignore him, ok?"

El huffed but nodded showing that she understood. She realized it'd just make everything awkward if she made the tension between her and James more apparent with the Party all gathered together.

"Hey El!" Mike greeted cheerfully. Instantly pulling El out of her thoughts. He always had a special skill with that.

"Mike!" El called, running up and hugging him.

Mike chuckled as he gently squeezed her tighter. "How were the other classes, El?"

"They weren't too bad. I survived." El joked with a smirk.

"That's good to hear! There's only four more classes left until the day is over and we go back home!"

"Great. Despite how exciting this all is, I can't wait to get back home and relax." El said.

"Trust me," Max interjected, "You'll have that feeling quite a bit."

"It should be easy to get used to though." Dustin assured.

Mike nodded in agreement. "By the way, El, are you free tomorrow?"

He watched El contemplate for a moment before nodding.

"Ok great! Tomorrow we're gonna-"

"Hello class! Please take your seats, we have a few things we need to go over." The teacher interjected. Stopping all the conversations in the room.

"I'll tell you about it in a minute." Mike assured retreating back to his seat. Along with everyone else.

El nodded, taking a seat next to him that the Party had saved for her.

"You'll all be doing a group project for these next couple of weeks.

There'll be three groups of seven. It seems like a pretty hefty project but there's a reason for the huge groups. As long as everyone does their job in each group, it'll go fast." Their teacher announced. Shortly grabbing a stack of packets and handing them out to everyone. "I want your groups to go over the events of world war 2, and I want you guys to focus mainly on the US when you're evaluating countries. At the end, tell me whether you believe the US could've done more in the war or whether you believe we should've done less. You'll have plenty of time to do this. Feel free to pick who's in your group of seven."

Once he was done talking, all the kids in the classroom scrambled around the room to find their group of seven. It was convenient for the Party, completely convenient.

"Guessing we're all in a group?" Mike asked.

"Actually," Dustin commented. "I think I should join a new group, Y'know, one that has a little more class." He smirked.

"Dustin, YOU don't even have class." Lucas joked. Earning a laugh out of everyone.

"Not true." Dustin defended. "I am a very sophisticated individual."

"And by 'sophisticated' you mean overly complicated and just a bit unorganized? If so then I totally agree." Will said.

The three of them started going back and forth, generating more laughs. Mike turned to El while the ongoing chaos continued.

"So El, back to what I was going to ask you."

"Hm?"

"Tomorrow we're having a sleepover. All of us are gonna be there, just like last summer."

El excitedly beamed at him. "Sounds like fun!"

A thought quickly crossed her mind as she replayed a few of the words he said.

"Wait, 'all of us'?"

Mike nodded. "Yeah. Everyone in the Party."

A moment of silence passed as El tried to hide her disappointment.

Mike glanced at James before putting two and two together and returning back to El's gaze. "El.."

"What? I didn't say anything!"

"No, but I know what you're thinking."

El broke their eye contact and sighed. She could count on both fingers how many times this talk popped up.

"El c'mon it's just one sleepover. What's the harm in that?" Mike said. Attempting to persuade her.

El shot him a bland look, practically replying to him without speaking a word.

"Look, everyone in the Party likes him, outside of you. They wanna get to know him better, and not to mention the fact that we've been waiting to do this again since summer."

"But does he HAVE to be there?"

Mike shrugged. "In order for us to get to know him, and for him to feel welcomed into the Party, yes."

El glanced at James for a second, shortly looking away with a disapproving expression.

"El please cheer up! It's supposed to be fun!" Mike pleaded. His pleas falling on deaf ears. "Hey if it makes you feel any better I'll tell him not to talk to you, okay? Would you be happier then?"

El met his eyes again contemplating the offer.

"And." Mike added while she thought. "I'll buy a bunch of eggos with my allowance money. Along with any toppings you want on them."

El rolled her eyes while a smile slowly crept on her face. "With Hershey kisses and whipped cream?"

"With Hershey kisses and whipped cream." Mike confirmed with a smile.

A small laugh escaped El's lips as she shook her head, realizing she let Mike's charm get to her.

"Ah, I see a smile. Is that a yes?" Mike asked.

El sighed defeated. "Fine."

"Great!" Mike happily exclaimed. "It'll be fun, trust me."

"Y'know, sometimes I hate how persistent you are." El remarked.

"I know." Mike replied. "But sometimes it's the only way to get you to try things out."

El raised an eyebrow at him.

"Plus." Mike added. "You'll probably enjoy it when he's there."

El shot him a skeptical expression. "I doubt that."

Mike let out a small laugh and smirked at her. "C'mon lets get this project started."

---

"What's next now, El?" Mike asked as the bell rang.

"Spanish." El replied. "I'm a bit nervous about that one."

Lucas came up and gave El a reassuring pat on the shoulder. "Don't sweat it, El, Spanish is easy. Once you learn the basics it'll be as easy as English."

Mike nodded. "Spanish is actually one of the easiest languages to learn. You'll be fine."

El was having a hard time believing how easy they say Spanish would be. How was she supposed to learn a new language when she was

still new to the one she already spoke? Intimidation had already set itself deep into El's subconscious, she'd just have to buckle down and prepare for the worse.

Soon everyone separated once more to go to their classrooms. Lucas, Dustin, and James were the only ones walking with El to her Spanish class since they shared it with her.

Dustin and Lucas tried their best to give El motivating words as they closed in onto the classroom. They only succeeded on getting her to smile at them gratefully for the votes of confidence.

The four of them entered the classroom and arranged seats next to one another.

"Buenos tardes, clasé." Their teacher greeted. El cluelessly looked around and tried to mouth the words as everyone repeated the greeting to the teacher.

"Today we'll be going over how to greet others and say goodbye to them. You all know 'Buenos dias' means 'Good morning', but today I'm going to hand out papers that have multiple ways to say hello and goodbye to someone. What I want is for all of you to go through them and teach each other how to pronounce them in case someone doesn't know how."

El felt some ease set in finding out their teacher wouldn't speak in Spanish the whole time. That put some of her worries to rest, but many others still spiraled in her head.

"Go ahead and pick a partner. Whenever you're ready feel free to begin to practice. I have a few tests to grade from the advanced classes, but if you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask me." The teacher said taking a seat.

Everyone began picking their partners and starting the session. Lucas and James paired up while Dustin paired up with El.

"You ready, El?" Dustin asked grabbing the paper and facing her.

El shook her head hesitantly.

"C'mon El, you're a total badass. You eat Demogorgons and Demo-

Dogs for breakfast. Spanish will be little to nothing for ya." Dustin encouraged.

El couldn't help but let out a small chuckle at his words. She knew he wasn't wrong. She's faced worse than this. Much worse.

"You've got this." He assured. He picked the sheet up and looked at the different greetings they could go over. "Alright, you already know good morning- which is?"

"Buenas dios'? El answered, completely butchering the words.

Dustin shrugged. "Close enough. We'll work on your pronunciation later. That's 'Buenos dias'. Now let's try 'good afternoon'."

El nodded ready for the next greeting.

"Same beginning just a different ending. 'Buenos tardes'."

"B..buenos...t...tardes...?" El slowly pronounced.

"Yeah! You got it, that was great!" Dustin said. Watching as El perked up in her seat happily getting her first phrase right.

"Now remember, 'buenos tardes' is good evening. 'Buenos dias' is good morning. We're gonna come back to all these greetings we're going over so I can quiz you on them, alright?" Dustin asked.

El nodded understandingly.

"Alright let's move onto the next one."

While Dustin taught El how to say the phrases, Lucas and James went back and forth saying phrases and defining them.

"You're pretty good at this, James. Do you already know these greetings and goodbyes?" Lucas asked a bit impressed.

James nodded. "I'm partially Hispanic on my moms side. She spoke Spanish when she was a little girl so she's been trying to teach me some outside of school."



"Wow, I wouldn't have guessed you were part Hispanic, dude. You never said anything about that." Lucas stated.

"I kinda kept to myself about my heritage around other people. I used to get picked on for what I am." James admitted.

"I understand." Lucas sympathized. "Getting picked on cooled down from what it used to be back then, but trust me, I get it too. Mostly because I'm dating Max. But we don't let that stop us from loving each other."

James nodded understandingly. "My parents went through the same thing when they first met each other. You two kind of remind me of them when they were younger."

A smile formed on Lucas' face. "That's nice to hear."

James nodded again with a smile of his own. "I hope you guys stay together and fight against what people say, like my parents did."

"Thanks." Lucas replied. "I hope we do too."

Lucas glanced to James' arm where he saw a pretty noticeable bruise. "I've been meaning to ask you this earlier, James, but um what's that on your arm?"

James glanced at the bruise on his arm and muttered a curse word as he covered it up. "It's nothing, I just fell down some stairs this morning."

"Oh." Lucas said nodding and pretending to believe him. He's been hit too many times from bullies and accidental strikes from his friends to not know what a bruise looks like from getting punched. "Y'know you can tell me anything, right? You can tell all of us in the Party anything."

"Yeah...I know." James replied hesitantly.

"Ok. Just letting you know, if there's anything happening you can tell us. If there's anything you wanna talk about don't hesitate to let us know."

James nodded and forced a smile onto his face. "I know. Thank you."

Lucas returned the smile, but he couldn't help but feel something wasn't right with James. He noticed James didn't want to push it at the moment. But he knew he had to bring it up with the rest of the Party.

"Good night?" Dustin quizzed.

"Buenos noches." El answered.

"Perfect." Dustin replied. "Good evening?"

"Buenos tardes." El answered again.

"Yup! Good!" Dustin confirmed. "Good morning?"

"Buenos dias." El answered.

"Great!" Dustin said proudly. "'Hello' and lastly 'goodbye'?"

"Hola, and adios." El answered.

"Yeah! Great job!" Dustin congratulated.

El silently celebrated to herself.

"See? I told you it was easy. There was nothing for you to worry about!"

El nodded. "Thanks Dustin. I'm glad you were able to help me out with this."

"No problem." Dustin said. "There is still more that we need to go over throughout the year. But we'll go over them like we did with these greetings. You'll have it down in no time!"

El nodded again understandingly. "I think I'm ready for the other greetings and goodbyes now."

Dustin smiled proudly. "Glad to hear that!" He looked at the sheet again for goodbyes. "Let's start with 'see you tomorrow.'"

---

Dustin, Lucas, James, and El all headed down to the lunchroom after the bell had rang. Knowing their next class was lunch and everyone in the Party shared the same lunch period.

They met up with the rest of the group at their designated lunch table.

"Hey I'm gonna use the bathroom really quick before I sit down." James said to Dustin.

"Oh, alright. We'll be where we always are." Dustin replied.

With a nod James broke off and went to the nearest restroom while Lucas, Dustin, and El continued to the table.

"Dustin." Lucas called. "I've been noticing something with James lately."

"Is it the bruises?" Dustin asked.

Lucas' expression turned serious. "You noticed it too?"

Dustin nodded.

"We need to bring this up at the table." Lucas said.

"Yeah. This might be something serious." Dustin agreed.

"Guys." Lucas called as they took their seats. "We gotta talk about James."

"Did something happen?" Max asked.

"No. Well... maybe. We're not sure right now but we think he's not telling us something." Lucas replied.

"Like what?" Will asked.

"He's got a few bruises on his arm. He might have more that we don't know about."

"What're you saying? Like somebody's doing this to him?" Mike asked.

"We think so." Dustin replied. "He keeps saying that he fell down some stairs this morning, but we know what a bruise looks like when someone fell, and when someone's getting bullied."

"What the hell? Someone's bullying him?" Max asked.

"Possibly." Lucas replied. "I don't know."

"Y'know," Dustin began. "That would explain why he was acting so weird this morning when I brought it up. It's almost as if I wasn't supposed to find out, because he looked nervous when he realized I noticed them."

"But why wouldn't he tell us someone is doing this to him?" Will questioned. "He knows we care about him." He glanced to El, reading the expression on her face from that statement. "Well, at least most of us do."

Lucas shrugged. "I told him that he can trust us and tell us anything. He knows that."

"Should we ask him about it then? It seems like it's something important that he should've told us. All of the evidence leads to the fact that someone else is doing this to him." Will stated.

"I think we should wait." Mike spoke. "I don't wanna risk pressuring him to tell us something he's not comfortable speaking about."

"But what if it's serious, Mike?" Lucas asked. "What if he IS being bullied by someone?"

"When we find out, we'll protect him. Together we'll put an end to it." Mike said confidently. Silently hoping that Lucas would be wrong.

---

"Slow down a bit, James." Will said trying to catch his breath while he walked with James.

"I can't, Lucas told me to help you build up your stamina and speed." James replied.

"What? Why'd he tell you to do that?"

"I dunno. I think him and the guys think you might need it. Besides, I may not be strong, but I sure as hell am fast. I know a bunch about running because I was in track." James said.

"So you're gonna be, like, my trainer or something?" Will asked.

"Give or take." James replied. "Just listen to my tips and you'll do fine! It's easy!"

Max and El were walking together after the collective jog everyone did. Max could tell it was a bit difficult to keep up with the class warm up since it wasn't something she did often. But regardless of her inexperience, she was doing better than Max expected.

"How you holding up, El?" Max asked.

El huffed. "It's rough. But not too bad."

Max nodded. "You'll get used to it. Will's trying to get in shape too."

El glanced at Will, seeing him receive advice from James about running. She found herself frowning at James despite the fact that their conversation was good natured.

Max glanced over at where El was looking and realized why she was frowning. "Looks like James is helping Will to get in shape."

"He shouldn't." El said. "Will's better off with someone else helping him."

"El, c'mon he's not that bad." Max said.

"He actually is." El replied.

"He means well. He's getting along with everyone, hell you two might even get along perfectly."

"There's no chance that's happening." El declared. "I'm not getting along with anyone I hate."

"You hated me before." Max added.

"That was because of a misunderstanding. James, James is different. He actually DID something." El replied.

"El, we all make mistakes." Max stated. "Most of them are ones we regret. I'm sure he's no different."

El gave her a skeptical look. Not really giving what she said actual thought. "You sound like Mike."

Max giggled. "You of all people should know that he has very wise words. You need to give the ones about James more thought."

"Uh-huh." El droned.

"Maybe you guys can make peace at the sleepover tomorrow." Max said.

El groaned. "I almost forgot he's gonna be there too. Perfect. Just perfect."

"Look if it makes any difference, we'll all be there, not just him. I doubt that he'll be on your mind the entire time." Max reassured.

"We'll see." El said.

Max smiled at El, partially giving up at the moment but figuring she'd come around in time. "I know a better topic we can talk about."

"Hm?" El hummed curiously.

"Ideas for You, Mike, Lucas and I, for a double date." Max replied.

El felt a grin begin to grow on her face.

---

After El's tiring session in gym class, her, Will, and Max, regrouped with the rest of the Party. They all shared the same Study Hall for their final class. James had detached from the group after gym class, they weren't sure as to why but he reassured them that he'd meet up with them at Study Hall.

El couldn't help but feel exhausted. She was more than glad to know

all she had to do was sit down with her friends and do homework before going back home. She had no clue how they all did this everyday for most of the year, but unfortunately it was going to be a cycle she had to endure and get used to.

"Days almost over, El." Will teased. "How do you feel?"

"Tired." El groaned.

"Don't worry." Will assured. "You'll get used to it. Everyone does."

"Yeah, El. Trust. It gets easier." Lucas agreed.

The group began to get closer their study hall classroom before all noticing James further down the hall. He looked in a rush and a bit troubled.

"Hey, James!" Dustin greeted cheerfully. "C'mon Study Hall's about to start."

"Uh hey, guys." James replied in some haste.

"What's wrong?" Will asked, noticing he seemed conflicted.

"Um it's...nothing." James replied, attempting to be nonchalant as he held his stomach but failing.

"What's wrong with your stomach?" Mike asked.

James realized he was starting to bring attention to his midsection. "Uh, nothing!"

He quickly removed his hand from his stomach but hissed in pain shortly afterward. Concerning the Party.

"What happened?" Mike asked.

"I...it's..." James stammered still contemplating on telling them.

Mike eyed him suspiciously before grabbing his shirt and lifting it up.

The whole group gasped upon seeing the painful bruise on James' stomach.

"It's nothing! I-it's fine!" James tried to reassure.

"Nothing? We've seen the bruises on your arm, James. What's going on? Is someone doing this to you?" Mike questioned.

"Mike...just-"

"Hey loser!" A voice called from behind James.

James' eyes went wide before he turned to face who was coming their way. "Jason..."

"Jason?" Dustin repeated.

"Heh. Your loner ass managed to find friends, huh?"

James stared silently at Jason. It all began to click together once the group realized he actually was being bullied.

"Is that what happened to your stomach?" Mike asked, anger evident in his voice.

"Mike c'mon, it's not that big of a deal." James said trying to downplay it.

"No it is! It is a big deal!" Mike replied suddenly turning to the bully. "Hey!"

Jason turned to him with an uninterested expression. "What."

"Did you do this to James?" Mike questioned.

"Yeah? So what if I did? He's not gonna do anything about it." Jason replied.

Mike wouldn't be surprised if James did nothing about Jason. Jason was pretty much taller than Mike himself. He had a lot of weight on him that seemed to make him physically imposing despite none of it being muscle. But Mike wasn't standing down. He'd faced bullies like this in the past. He wasn't letting any of his friends get harassed while he could do something about it.



"You think it's funny don't you?" Mike asked. "Messing with someone? Bruising them?"

Jason shrugged nonchalantly. "Yeah kinda."

"You make me sick." Mike said. "You're not gonna mess with James anymore. You're gonna leave him alone."

"Oh yeah?" Jason said getting in Mike's face. "Who's gonna stop me?"

Upon hearing that the rest of The Party huddled behind Mike and James to let their presence be known.

Jason scoffed noticing he was outnumbered. He knew he wasn't a match for all of them standing up to him at once. "Hmph. You're lucky your friends are here to save your ass." Jason said beginning to turn around.

The Party watched him slowly leave. James looked to Mike with relief on his face, thankful for them virtually saving him. But everything changed once Jason decided to utter a slur out loud as he was leaving. A slur well known and vile. One of the worst things one could say to someone of a darker skin tone.

James lost it. He lunged at Jason and threw a well aimed punch at his head.

Lucas was about to jump in and help him after hearing what he said, but he was held back by Dustin, Will, and Max.

James was about to throw another punch at Jason before receiving one back, flooring him instantly. He started advancing towards James' weak and bruised form until Mike jumped in between both of them and pushed Jason back.

"Leave him alone!" Mike demanded.

Jason roughly grabbed Mike by the shirt and threw him on the ground. He cocked his arm back ready to begin pummeling the smaller framed boy. But he shortly realized his fist was immobilized.

"What the?" Jason said in a struggle with himself.

He suddenly began hitting himself repeatedly. Knocking himself down after a handful of blows. He looked at his fist horrified, and

wondering what had just occurred.

"You kids are weird!" He declared before running off.

James looked to El who was glaring at Jason as he left, spotting some blood dripping from her nose.

"Thanks..." James spoke, a little hesitantly.

"I did it for Mike, not you." El coldly replied turning and checking on Mike.

"Oh...r-right..." James said looking down.

"Are you ok, Mike?" El asked concerned.

"I'm fine." Mike reassured. "You?"

"I'm good. Barely used any strength on that mouth breather." El replied.

"Guys let's hurry and get to class before we're late." Mike spoke while El helped him to his feet.

Max, Dustin, and Will helped James' to his feet before they all eventually headed to their class together. A little shaken up but glad no one was seriously hurt.

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While waiting for the kids to get back from school, Hopper had visited Joyce. There was something important he had to get off his chest, and she was the one who he trusted to tell at the moment.

"I threw something up yesterday." Hopper said with a serious look. "Some...type of creature. Like a slug but bigger. I think I managed to kill it before it got away, but I got a huge hunch that it's from whatever I encountered in the tunnels last year."

Joyce looked back at him with a shocked expression. Fear was clear and visible on her face. Wishing that he was only bluffing.

"I only brought this up with you, Joyce, I didn't wanna get the kids worked up again."

"Are you saying that it's back?" Joyce asked concerned.

Hopper shrugged. "I'm not sure, I'm just saying we may need to keep a lookout. Just stay cautious."

"What about Will? He's not safe if that thing is trying to come back here!" Joyce stated.

"Joyce, that thing won't get to Will." Hopper reassured. "It knows better than to go after him again, trust me. All I'm saying is that we watch out for anything suspicious. If you see anything, you need to tell me."

Joyce eyed Hopper, worried and unsure of what to do. But hesitantly, she agreed. She didn't like the thought of the Upside Down coming back, just the thought of it scared her. From what Hopper was saying, nothing had gotten serious. But she was going to keep an eye on both Jonathan and Will to make sure they were safe. Even if there was no guarantee of a return. She wasn't taking any chances.

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### *Elsewhere in Hawkins...*

Inside of an abandoned warehouse the clear slug-like creature that Dustin had thrown up had mutated into a pod. It pulsed with a red glow that grew brighter then slowly faded. It sensed a creature close to it. A moth, flying close by, distracted by the red glow within the membrane. A tentacle whipped out of the pod and grabbed a hold of the moth. Forcing it into the pod. Gurgling could be heard as the moth began to change within the pod. Morphing. Mutating into something more sinister.

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**Hope you all enjoyed this chapter! I'm not sure when the next one will be out for this story, but I'm going to upload the first chapter to my next story which is The Walking Dead Final Season. This story will be about the video game, not the show. The first chapter is already done, all I have to do is upload it whenever I can, then after that's done I will work on the next**

chapter for Sportsmanship! I will work as fast as I can for that chapter since there's already been an 8 month wait for that story. (I do apologize so so so so so so so so so so dearly). But I do hope you enjoyed this chapter! if you're not mad at me for the lack of content then feel free to review and let me know how you felt about this chapter! Until the next one, see ya!